WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ENGLAND?

CRITICISM AND A REPLY

BY

Sir GILBERT PARKER, Bart., M.P.

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Since the beginning of the war I have had a very large correspondence with American citizens, and have watched closely the trend of opinion in the United States through a great number of newspapers which come to me regularly. The United States being the most important of all the neutral nations, and with a scheme of government and with ambitions for civilization differing only in colour and detail from our own, its opinion and judgment are of deep importance to all other nations engaged in the war. During the last few months, some correspondents, friendly but critical, and a few others, unfriendly and censorious, and also newspapers, impatient with the slow progress of the war, and impressed by Germany's great military organization, have asked questions which may be condensed as follows:

(1) Why is there so much drinking in Great Britain at this time of national crisis?

(2) Do not the strikes in South Wales show a lack of patriotism and an indication that the Trades Unions are not strong for the war?

(3) Why are your able-bodied men so backward in answering their country's call to the colours?

(4) Why are the armies you have managed to raise proving so inactive and ineffective on the Western front?

(5) Why have you not met the demands of your Generals for munitions?

(6) Above all, why is your Navy—Britain's pride and boasted bulwark—doing so little to justify its reputation? Why does it not search the German Navy out in the Baltic and come to blows?

I feel that these questions ought to be answered thus publicly to several correspondents and to newspapers, which, bearing us no ill-will, are almost nervously anxious about our progress.

Let me begin with Drink.

Drink has always been "a canker of industrial civilization." If it is so conspicuous now, it is largely due to the sense of responsibility so greatly felt by the best part of the population. It is because they are pursuing a course of patriotic effort and individual sacrifice with almost sacred conviction, and indulgence such as attracts no vital attention in normal conditions seems an offence when the nation's existence is at stake. Also, in every urban population there is always a percentage of selfish, disreputable and irresponsible people who reflect discredit on the whole community.

The economic dislocation of war has brought unexpected earnings into the pockets of this stratum, which represents about ten or twelve per cent. of the whole, and the money has gone where it would always have gone, alas! had it been forthcoming. There is no difference in will here, only in opportunity.

"*But 'boozing' has been rife among the working-classes in general,*" it is said by the critic, private and journalistic.

Well, the stimulus of war intensifies all passions, good and bad. In time of war all is abnormal. All virtues are intensified and, till the inevitable level is found, vices also are unduly emphasized. It is only natural that war should call out more opposites in fuller action than is possible to peace; should do so till the better spirit leavens all that is done and said; till pure patriotism posseses in some degree all varieties of mind and character.

"*What are we doing about this drink evil?*"

Well, its cure was the most burning question of party politics in time of peace, but since the beginning of the war ordinary political controversies have ceased and new methods necessary to the moment have been adopted for minimising the evil. It must be remembered that any spasmodic increase of drink which there may be in any particular district is not due to vicious idleness and self-indulgence, though in a small degree that may play its part. Some of the heaviest drinkers, strange to say, are the hardest workers; are men who toil every day in the week and put forward all the energy they have. Great exhaustion follows; they resort to drink to pull the [illegible] to the normal; and unhappily, it sends them for the moment beyond the normal, with a corresponding reaction. Over-work, in a vast number of cases, is the cause of extra drinking, sad as it is. The Government, however, have been compelled to deal with all cases of excessive drinking severely. Local authority is given, under a law passed in the present Parliament, to inflict punishment for neglect of work through drink, and local authorities have sternly imposed fines for idleness due to over-indulgence, or for idleness due to any other cause. A moral evil cannot, of course, be suppressed suddenly by law, but the bad effects of this moral evil are being reduced, first by salutary punishment, and secondly by the fact that the workmen themselves, over-excited at first by the war and all its horrors, and, because of it, flying to intoxicants, are regaining their normal condition. They are now exhibiting no more self-indulgence than would be found in any other community where wages had suddenly nearly doubled in a great many trades, and earners had not adjusted their social position accordingly, or raised their standard of living, but had momentarily expended the surplus in pleasure. It is, however, a gross misrepresentation to say that Great Britain is drunken, in the sense that her critics in some of the neutral countries—the United States included—have declared her to be. A percentage of the workers may be unpatriotic in not grasping their own individual responsibility where the nation's safety and security are at stake, but the vast majority have a grave view of what they should do and how they should act in the nation's, and their own, time of trouble.

"*But what of the coal strike in South Wales which has shocked the United States? Was not that a deliberate and unpatriotic act?*" is the further query.

Yes, if ignorance can be deliberate; and everybody knows how peculiarly miners everywhere are, by the very circumstances of their calling, isolated from the general current of life and public feeling among their countrymen above ground. Consider. War comes with its huge industrial demands. It inflates the owner's profits, it increases the miner's grievances. Not only in South Wales has the miner resorted to strikes in time of war. He gave way to them in the North fifty years ago at the height of the American Civil War, and he has struck work in Hungary, Saxony and Silesia since this war began (not to speak of a recent strike among the prosperous armament workers at Krupps). The late strikes in South Wales are unfortunate, but they are not caused by an inherent viciousness in the miner of South Wales. It is an almost automatic result of an abnormal situation, of a strained excitement, the more powerful because the British man is not outwardly demonstrative; but the really remarkable thing about the South Wales strikes is, that disputes which might have opened up the whole social problem have been settled so speedily. A few days negotiations, and South Wales was at work again, and before there had been any sensible diminution in output. Also, it must be remembered that South Wales is not the only mining district in the British Isles, but is one of many. Yet the strikes have been mainly confined to this particular region, which is much isolated and where there is an excitable population.

"*What about the lack of munitions? Is it not due to strikes and drink? Germany has munitions enough and to spare—why has not Great Britain?*"

No, there are deeper causes for the lack of munitions than these things. These have played no extensive part, especially the former. Germany laid up her stores in time of peace, and she organised in time of peace her whole engineering industry, so that she could mobilize it immediately for armament-production during war. It was not her way to make war in Europe, or on the world, without preparation in keeping with her prodigious ambitions. She had no intention of setting the powder-magazine alight till she could be sure of making a sufficiently large explosion. Great Britain, however, not planning an Armageddon for Europe, was accordingly not competing with Germany in this respect. If she had determined to be supreme in offensive armament, her capacity for production would have given her a national arsenal far exceeding that of Germany. That, however, would have meant a policy of aggression, while ours was a policy of defence. Building up a huge army for the defence of Great Britain was not necessary. Our Navy could perform that task, and it was a purely defensive force. We were a non-militarist nation, and before this war any Government of Great Britain proposing to pile up munitions of war, after the manner of Germany, would have been driven from power without shrift. All our interests demanded peace; we were committed to vast social reforms, and we were thinking of them and not of war.

We went to war because we were in honour bound so to do; to defend Belgium whose neutrality had been violated and her people sacrificed; to prevent France being reduced to a third-rate power; to prevent all Western Europe being given over to the German conqueror. Before this war came we estimated our munitions-supply for our garrison in India and for an expeditionary force of 160,000 men, and no army has ever gone forth to war more splendidly equipped than the force which went from England to Flanders in the autumn of last year. But it was not enough. We found at once, contrary to advice and expectation, that we must support our allies with all our strength on land as well as on sea.

"*What have we done during the past year?*" We have raised an army of 3,000,000 men and are steadily equipping them—as fine a body of men as the world has seen, so every neutral observer has said, so Frederick Palmer,* who knows the armies of the world, has declared. We have multiplied our production of munitions nearly three hundredfold, and we are taking steps to multiply it many times more. To keep the equipment of our own army abreast of the enormous increase in its personnel would have been impossible in any case; but, from the beginning, it was necessary to place our resources at the disposal of our allies as well. Germany's sinister preparedness enabled her armies to occupy some of the most important industrial centres of French Flanders and Russian Poland; and Woolwich, Sheffield and Birmingham have had to take over the work of Lille and Lodz. And yet, at the present rate of progress, it is certain that we shall ere long produce enough to supply ourselves and to give further help to our allies—that, in fact, we shall overhaul and surpass the German supply of munitions during the next phase of the war. With time on our side, we shall prove equal to this gigantic task; but we cannot perform miracles. It would have been a miracle if we had had munitions enough for the unexpected demand. In spite of all scepticism we have done greatly more than might reasonably have been expected.

"*But what about that big 'Kitchener' army of yours? The Germans say it is bluff. They assert cynically that it is a rational economy to minimise your output of munitions when you have no men to handle them.*"

Lacking in men? A fiasco in recruiting? No reproach could be more ludicrously undeserved and at variance with the facts. The self-governing Dominions alone, with their sparse populations, have trained or are training 350,000 men—one hundred thousand more than the total strength of the British standing army (excluding the reserves) at the outbreak of war. And the proportion of enlistments among our home population has been much higher. The much-abused miners were the first to volunteer freely, when the news came that the German invaders had battened down Belgian miners, to perish in their pits at Charleroi. Men enough for five battalions presented themselves within a

* The American War Correspondent representing the Press of the United States at the Front.

week at the recruiting depots of the Durham Light Infantry. They flocked in from the mines in such numbers that we became anxious for our coal supply—until we found that the patriots who stayed at home were able and eager to shoulder the work of the patriots who left the mines for Flanders. And when the Ministry of Munitions was formed the other day, what was the initial step taken? The first care was to search out and try to recall the skilled mechanics and engineers in the new armies, who had not already fallen in battle or been proved indispensable to the military forces. If that was worth while, it shows in what large numbers the engineering profession must have responded to Lord Kitchener's appeal, and there is no reason to believe that the engineers have been more specially patriotic than the other trades, professions and classes in the country. No, the great bulk of able-bodied men in Great Britain, working-class and upper-class, married and unmarried, have put their lives at their country's disposal, and are either fighting, or learning how to fight, at this moment. It would be not far from the truth to say that the vast majority of men have done their duty and have proved their patriotism.

"*Why has your great Spring offensive never materialised on the Western front?*"

Who declared officially that we were going to undertake such and such operations at such and such a date? It may be ascribed to a section of the British press, speaking in its hopefulness during last winter when there was such hard going; and certainly it may be attributed to the German press at the present time, whose transparent object is to congratulate itself that our hypothetical plans have failed. But, in any case, is our Supreme Command bound to "fulfil the scripture" of journalists, and enemy journalists to boot?

Lord Kitchener never promised an offensive in the Spring. He kept his own counsel, as we would expect of any Minister charged with a public trust; and he is not likely to depart from that policy to gratify the curiosity of the world. He spoke of May as a momentous period. He said that the war would really begin in May. Has it not been so? Have not the armies of all the belligerents greatly increased since then, and have not the operations developed enormously? It may be said that it has been Germany's operations of attack which have so vastly increased. Granted; but so have the operations of defence increased proportionately.

We are well content with what our troops and their French and Belgian comrades have done and are doing under their appointed leaders. Between them they are holding up and wearing down over 2,000,000 Germans in the West, and if there is little that is dramatic to record, it is because the Germans have been given too rough a reception to keep up a demonstration in their earlier style. The eventual strategy in the West probably hinges upon the competition in munitions; but after all we are not confining our energies to the trenches of Belgium and France. While the Germans are making their costly "drives" in Poland,

the Turkish Empire is at bay in the Dardanelles, and Germany has more to lose at the Straits than she can ever gain on the Vistula. Is it realized how many men and how much munitions we have sent to the Dardanelles, and what the prodigious nature of that operation is? It has been said that we entered upon it light-heartedly. That is not the truth. It was a deliberate decision, in which were taken into account all the difficulties and all the sacrifices which must be made. We have sent an army out there which is probably as large as the army sent to South Africa; we have set it to work in a country more trying than South Africa, and where the natural drawbacks are greater.

Our armies have been fighting in France, Belgium, the Dardanelles, Egypt, British East Africa, South West Africa, the Cameroons, and the Persian Gulf.

Finally, there is the British Navy.

"*Why doesn't your Navy get a move on? Why doesn't it come out and make the German Navy fight?*" we are loudly asked.

Well, that is the one thing it cannot do. It takes two fleets to make a battle. To meet the German battle-squadrons in the open sea is what we have been asking for since the beginning of the war. If the interested neutral thinks we should meet it by ramming our Dreadnoughts against the ring of mines behind which it lies in hiding, I hardly know how we shall counsel together. Mines are mines, and they can lay intrepid Dreadnoughts low at no cost save that of the making.

What service could our Navy be doing that it is not doing now? It has swept the German merchant marine from the seas, sent the German commerce raiders to follow it, and isolated the German colonies from all commercial or military intercourse with the Fatherland.

It has prevented the German Navy from giving any assistance to its colonies, either with supplies or men.

It has enabled our own commerce and the commerce of our Allies to keep the sea in war as safely, for practical purposes, as in time of peace. Our mercantile marine and our Navy are larger than they were when the war began, so the First Lord of the Admiralty has informed us.

It has covered the transport of our troops from every part of the world to the British Isles, and from the British Isles to Flanders and the Dardanelles. A year of war passed before the first British transport was sunk on seas otherwise traversed without let or hindrance from German warcraft, whether on the surface or below it, not to speak of their boasted fleet in the air.

It has made possible the incredible disembarkation on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Naturally, the Germans talk big about the Zeppelins and U. boats. It distracts attention from their battle fleet. That fleet was Kaiser William's masterpiece. It has cost untold millions of dollars and absorbed the service of hundreds of thousands of highly skilled men. And it is now a negligible quantity. It is having no influence whatever upon the course of the war, and it is likely to go on eating its head off in the Kiel

Canal till the German General Staff runs short of metal and melts down its armour-plate for shells.

That is what our Navy has done—deeds worthy of its own tradition and of all the greatest accomplishments of sea-power in recorded history. But I can do no better than refer your readers to Mr. Balfour's recent letter to the New York "World," for the First Lord of the Admiralty states what his service has accomplished, with a brilliance and lucidity which I cannot rival.

The Neutral World is in danger of misunderstanding Great Britain's temper, because we have been thrashing out in public the gigantic problems set us by this war, in political debate and in the controversies of the press, with a frankness of self-criticism peculiar to people of Anglo-Saxon blood. Those who know us will not take this characteristic as an indication of discouragement and miscarriage. We are not bestirring and berating ourselves because we have done so little hitherto, but because we are inciting each other to do more than we have done. The broad facts I have put forward ought to be sufficient proof of this; but if America is "looking for a sign," and a dramatic sign, of the British people's spirit at this crisis of its history, I need only dwell for a moment in conclusion upon the recent and second Great War Loan.

"In what way was this Second War Loan a sensational success?"

The success of the British Government's Second War Loan is direct evidence of the determination and confidence of the "nation of shopkeepers." The subscriptions to the loan were the largest ever made to any single issue, namely, three thousand million dollars ($3,000,000,000), and the number of subscribers, namely, 1,300,000, testified to British determination to win the war. Confidence in the ability of the Allies to do so was widespread in this country at a time when the Russian retreat in Poland might have damped the ardour of the people.

It is significant that in the number of individual applications the working classes bulked most largely. But the confidence and determination of the middle-class investors—men notoriously careful in the disposal of their capital—was probably the most notable feature. Half a million middle-class investors subscribed an average of about five thousand dollars ($5,000) each, and under circumstances of exceptional difficulty. The war had caused such a depreciation in the value of older securities all over the world, that it was a sad business for holders of such securities to exchange from them into the new loan. Further, in England alone of belligerent countries, the Government has had the courage to impose extra taxation to meet part of the war expenditure—taxation that included the doubling of the income tax. What is that taxation? It is one hundred and seventy millions a year more than it was before the war; so our Chancellor of the Exchequer informed us the other day. This taxation, as all the world knows, has been cheerfully met.

British investors subscribed this loan in circumstances very different from those in which the smaller German war loans

were issued. England, unlike Germany, did not suspend specie payment at the outbreak of war; she goes on trading with the world over-seas, and as a belligerent nation always has to import more than usual, and is unable, owing to enlistment of industrial workers, to export as much as usual, she has had to issue her loans in face of an adverse trade-balance, such as cannot trouble Germany, whose Fleet is unable to protect her overseas commerce. Then Great Britain, unlike Germany, is not under the martial law which enables the German Government to force its new securities on the wills of its subjects. Nor does England enjoy the doubtful benefit of a number of special war pawnshops (of which the Darlehnskassen are only one of many sections), which issue notes unbacked by gold to would-be subscribers to war loans.

It is true, however, that some special facilities were arranged to avoid excessive calling-in of loans in connection with the payments on the Second British War Loan. But the full statements relating thereto show that insignificant advantage was taken of these facilities, apart from the fact that the British Government, taking a leaf out of the book of New York City, deposited some of the surplus proceeds of the loan with the English joint-stock banks, instead of keeping the whole of its balances with the Bank of England.

It has never been denied that the success of this British loan showed the confidence of British people in the justice and good prospects of their cause. It also showed clear evidence of their will and resolution. It was the second war loan issued in London, and the contrast with the first makes this point clear. True enough it was offered at a better rate of interest, but against that the date of repayment was not so near. The first loan was issued when the collapse at the Marne of the German attack on Paris was still fresh enough in men's minds to make peace seem in sight; the second loan was issued when the Russian retreat in Poland made peace seem a matter of years. Yet the second loan realised three thousand millions of dollars ($3,000,000,000), against seventeen hundred millions of dollars ($1,700,000,000) obtained by the first, and the success of the first loan was only made possible by disproportionately large subscriptions by banks and other big City interests. These were almost as excessive in proportion to the whole as were the subscriptions of corresponding classes to the second German War Loan. But, while Germany went from bad to worse in this respect, Great Britain rose to the occasion, when the extent of the emergency was realised.

The memorable success of the second British War Loan was ensured by the fine energy and faith and loyalty of the ordinary citizen and the devotion of his savings to the national cause. What clearer sign of resolution could be asked than this incident in the history of a people's patriotism?

Has England played her part with the Allies in this war?

Her Navy was her natural contribution to any great war. It was to do the work of preserving the overseas trade of her allies, of preventing the fleets of belligerent nations from possessing the

coasts of her Allies, of crippling and neutralizing completely the power of enemy navies. It has done that far more successfully than could have been dreamed. The German Navy is powerless as a navy. A fleet of submarines, steadily diminishing, and preying upon a peaceful mercantile marine: has taken its place.

What has Great Britain done? Without her, France would now be under the heel of the Teuton. With Great Britain's Army helping her, France has been able, slowly but surely, to complete her own equipment, and both Belgium and herself have been saved from the worst by that Army of Great Britain which has paid its toll of five hundred thousand casualties since the beginning of the war.

Great Britain has given to France and Russia munitions of war which she needed for herself; and it is a remarkable fact, but a true one, that, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer recently said in the House of Commons, Great Britain has loaned to the Allies and the Dominions of the British Empire the vast sum of £425,000,000. The strength and out-giving of a nation is not to be judged alone by men, and the variety of Great Britain's contributions to the war is stupendous. It has not reached its limit; while the startling and onerous increase of taxation in the present Budget has been cheerfully and gallantly met by a people who before the war felt that they were carrying all they could bear. Its greatest efforts are now being made, and the friends of the Allies may be sure that Great Britain, which did not fear Napoleon, but brought him to his doom and rescued Europe from his tyranny, will save European civilization and the civilization of the world from that German Kultur which makes of Belgium a charnel-house and an abattoir.

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